

AKHBAR : SINAR HARIAN
MUKA SURAT : 10
RUANGAN : NASIONAL

8,500 premis diberi amaran langgar akta larangan merokok

KUALA SELANGOR - Sebanyak 8,500 premis di seluruh negara diberi amaran berikutan melanggar Akta Kawalan Produk Merokok Demi Kesehatan Awam 2024 (Akta 852) yang berkuat kuasa pada 1 Oktober lalu.

Menteri Kesehatan, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, kesalahan itu dikesan menerusi 283 operasi khas dengan membabitkan seramai 4,481 penguat kuasa dari Kementerian Kesehatan Malaysia (KKM) dalam operasi selama lima hari yang berakhir pada Sabtu.

Bagaimanapun katanya, tiada kompaun dikenakan terhadap premis sebaliknya ke-

menterianya lebih memberi penekanan soal kesedaran dan program berbentuk pendidikan.

"Kita tidak ambil tindakan penguatkuasaan seperti kompaun dan sebagainya, sebaliknya hanya memberi amaran berbentuk literasi, pencerahan dan penjelasan terlebih dahulu," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian selepas meninjau Premis Bersih, Bebas Asap Negeri Selangor di Grandeur Labs, Puncak Alam di sini pada Ahad.

Dr Dzulkefly menegaskan, pihaknya tidak teragak-agak mengambil tindakan tegas sekiranya mereka masih ingkar melakukan kesalahan sama berkuat kuasa pada 1 April tahun depan.

Menurut beliau, operasi itu

juga turut mengambil tindakan penguatkuasaan terhadap 12 perokok di seluruh negara atas kesalahan merokok di tempat larangan.

"Bagi kesalahan merokok, kita mengambil tindakan tegas mengikut peraturan sedia ada," jelas beliau.

Mulai 1 Oktober 2024, Akta Kawalan Produk Merokok Demi Kesehatan Awam 2024 (Akta 852) telah mula dikuatkuasakan.

Menerusi akta itu, terdapat beberapa peruntukan berkaitan penjualan produk merokok yang berbentuk permainan dan menarik perhatian golongan kanak-kanak serta remaja yang bertujuan mengekang kebolehdapatan produk tersebut.



Dr Dzulkefly (tiga dari kiri) menampal poster larangan merokok di sebuah premis di Grandeur Labs, Puncak Alam pada Ahad.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 5
RUANGAN : NATION

Minding their mental health

Push for improved support for employees in workplaces

By FAZLEENA AZIZ
fazleena@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Incorporating mental health into the Employment Act 1955 could greatly benefit both employees and employers as it will formalise responsibilities and protections, says the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC).

Its president Mohd Effendy Abdul Ghani said this can be done through mandatory mental health leave or stress leave, similar to sick leave.

"There should also be clear guidelines on addressing workplace harassment or conditions that contribute to poor mental health.

"Access to mental health services such as counselling as part of employee benefits and on-site counsellors could help employees address personal or work-related mental health challenges in a timely manner," he said.

"With immediate support, it can potentially improve employee well-being and productivity. Training should also be provided for managers to identify and address mental health issues early on."

Mohd Effendy noted that many workers might feel overwhelmed by job demands or suffer from stress-related illnesses, but may not report these issues.

"Collecting data through surveys or feedback would help identify the extent of these concerns and allow MTUC to advocate for stronger mental health protections at the national level," he said.

"MTUC can assist employees facing mental health challenges



Mindset shift: Prof Rozanah says incorporating mental health into the Employment Act would signify a progressive move that mental health is just as important as physical health. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

by providing legal advice, guiding them through the complaint process with authorities, and urging employers to take appropriate actions to support affected workers.

"There is a possibility that many workers are unaware that MTUC also addresses mental health issues, as they might primarily associate the union with traditional concerns like wages and benefits," he said.

Incorporating mental health into the Employment Act would signify a progressive move that mental health is just as important as physical health, said Prof Dr Rozanah Ab Rahman.

Prof Rozanah, who is the deputy dean of Universiti Putra Malaysia's School of Business and Economics, said this could include

provisions and guidelines on managing workplace stress, and protections for employees suffering from mental health conditions.

"Globally, many countries started to integrate mental health into their employment laws and this would encourage workers to seek assistance without fear of discrimination.

"The laws regarding mental health in the workplace in Malaysia are still evolving, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 currently laid down the duty of employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace, and this includes mental health.

"One of the objectives of the Act remains to promote an occupational environment for persons at work which is adapted to their

physiological and psychological needs.

"Although the provisions in the Act do not explicitly mention mental health, the current amendment to the Act 2022 addressed the occupational health matters arising out of any conditions of work, under the occupational health services provision of the Act," she said.

However, Prof Rozanah said that these provisions still focus primarily on the physical health of workers and do not adequately address issues like depression related to their tasks and working environment that may trigger mental health illnesses due to occupational stress.

She also said the Human Resources Ministry has issued guidelines on the prevention of stress and violence in the workplace to raise awareness among employers and workers about managing mental health issues.

Prof Rozanah said the Mental Health Act 2001 on the other hand focuses more on the treatment and care of persons with mental disorders rather than provisions related to workplace mental health.

However, one relevant policy available for workers' mental health is the National Mental Health Policy (revised in 2012), which in general provides strategies and guidelines to address issues in mental health, she pointed out.

With the Mental Health Regulations 2010, she said there was room to expand these regulations to more comprehensively cover workplace settings, integrating support structures for employees.

Boosting employees' well-being means better work

PETALING JAYA: Good mental health is directly related to work performance while an unhealthy one can lead to hindrance in basic work necessities like brain fog, fatigue and demotivation, according to employees.

M. Lakshmi, who works as an executive in Subang Jaya, said mental health issues resulted not only in subpar quality work but also costs a lot as mental health treatment is an expensive affair.

"It may not be a viable option for individuals to explore should they feel the need to seek help. Companies offering mental health provisions would help ease the burden and help people take the first step towards getting help.

"This happened to me. I used the capped amount from the company and after it finished, I decided to pursue the sessions on my own but at a reduced consulting hour, so I could still seek the help needed at my own financial pace," she said in response to the importance of good mental health at the workplace.

Digital Marketing Executive April Wong, 32, from Kepong said that maintaining a healthy mindset opens up more opportunities and work possibilities.

Even when faced with a heavy workload, having the right support can make it manageable, she added.

"Just like in our studies, we put in effort and learn how to support one another. This is a positive form of stress. It helps build bonds and a sense of belonging in the workplace.

"However, external stress caused by bad managers, denial of effort, and humiliation can lead subordinates to express themselves less," she said.

On whether there should be a capped amount provided by a company as part of its medical allocation, Wong considers mental health to be under necessity.

She said some companies provide counsellors to support mental well-being, but this does not address the real problem.

"Stress can arise from family issues or toxic work politics. While employees must find a balance between work and personal life for family matters, work politics may occur due to immature colleagues or ineffective managers," she said.

"Ultimately, it's HR's responsibility to ensure a healthy work environment for all colleagues."

Communications officer Iris Mohamed 31, from Ulu Kelang said that employers should provide mental health medical provisions with a capped yearly amount.

She said there is a rising mental health problem at workplaces — which should be looked at, especially anxiety caused by pressure from employers.

"If they give such an allocation, at least we know that mental health issues are being recognised and supported by our employers," she said.

Experts: It's as vital as physical health

PETALING JAYA: Mental health conditions, often hidden or unspoken, are as important as physical health issues, experts say.

Conditions like anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia can significantly impact employees' well-being and productivity, leading to serious consequences if left untreated.

Eve Psychosocial Rehabilitation Centre general manager Rozana Anthony said employees with mental health issues may become less engaged in their work and experience a lack of motivation or morale.

"They may also take frequent days off, isolate themselves and exhibit mood swings.

"Those with mental health issues or burnout will never come out to say it because it would seem unprofessional," she said.

"But having a mental issue doesn't mean they are not functioning, you will not even know they have issues. But we need to break the stigma, we need to be more aware about these issues."

Citing someone who has bipolar, Rozana said the signs and symptoms vary for each person.

She said in most cases people may not even know someone is

bipolar if they are taking the right medication.

They will only know if they stop and symptoms start emerging and go into relapse, she added.

Building trust between employers and employees is crucial in addressing mental health issues.

By creating a safe and accepting environment, employees can feel comfortable discussing their concerns and seeking appropriate support, Rozana said.

"There are a lot of companies coming up with mental health breaks, conducting training, conferences and talks but these are more on surface levels like ticking the boxes," she added.

Among other ways companies can help is to offer a year scheme with a capped amount for employees to seek help from mental health practitioners and retain a company counsellor that can be accessed by employees as and when needed.

Clinical psychologist Dr Noor Aishah Rosli said providing workplace counsellors is highly beneficial as it allows employees access to mental health support by normalising seeking help and improving overall well-being, job satisfaction and retention.

She said counsellors can also

"Those with mental health issues or burnout will never come out to say it because it would seem unprofessional."

Rozana Anthony

help monitor their progress based on emotion or behaviour.

"Some of the causes of mental health issues at the workplace such as high workload, lack of control, unclear expectations or toxic environments can cause stress or depression.

"You need a psychologist or counsellor at work setting to recognise changes in behaviour, cause of absenteeism or reasons for underperformance to spot the issues.

"Psychological assessment or screening tests to measure emo-

tion and behaviour can help address such issues and reduce them," she said.

Noor Aishah added that offices could also create quiet spaces by creating a corner or "mental health corner" with massage chairs, big balls and stress balls infused with aromatherapy to create a calming effect.

According to Noor Aishah, those with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or bipolar disorder can function well by managing their symptoms by using certain coping strategies and medication consistently.

According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023: Non-Communicable Diseases and Healthcare Demand, about one million people aged 15 years old and above were found to be suffering from depression.

The survey also found that the prevalence of mental health problems among children had jumped from 7.9% in 2019 to 16.5% in 2023, affecting one in six children aged five to 15 in Malaysia.

Recently a study by a human resource company called Remote ranked Malaysia as the second worst country for work-life balance.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 9
RUANGAN : NATION

Health measures rolled out at shelters

Evacuees given aid to avoid contagious diseases

By IMRAN HILMY
imran@thestar.com.my

ALOR SETAR: Comprehensive health and hygiene measures are being introduced at all active temporary relief centres (PPS) in Kedah to prevent the spread of any contagious diseases among flood evacuees.

State health committee chairman Mansor Zakaria said this is to protect and safeguard the affected communities and curb any outbreak of diseases such as cholera.

He said although no cholera infections or any other serious contagious infections have been reported at the centres so far in the state, the proactive measures are necessary, particularly during times of natural disasters like floods, where a large number of people are housed in a closed environment.

He also said during the floods, health officers were deployed to all the active PPS to conduct medical checks on the evacuees to identify if anyone showed signs or symptoms of any illness.

"We want to make sure that any potential health risks are promptly addressed.

"The Social Welfare Department (JKM) together with the medical teams also provided continuous guidance to flood victims at the centres to make sure they complied with safety protocols such as maintaining personal hygiene and minimising risk of disease transmission," he said, adding that the Civil Defence Force (APM) personnel helped enforce the safety protocols.

He said face masks and hand sanitisers were among the first items handed out to the evacuees when they came in.

Mansor said the main concern

was to prevent the outbreak of contagious diseases such as measles, Covid-19, and other infectious illnesses that can spread rapidly in crowded environments.

"Those individuals with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure were also given attention with follow-up care and medication being provided to ensure that they receive the necessary treatment while staying at the relief centres," he said.

He also reminded flood victims who have since returned to their homes to continue practising high hygiene standards, especially when cleaning their homes following the aftermath of floods.

"They should also continue drinking only bottled or boiled water and consume food thoroughly cooked as contaminated water and food causes flood vic-



Taking refuge: People seen in tents at a flood relief shelter in Alor Setar in this file photo. — Bernama

tims to contract water-borne diseases," he added.

There were 40 PPS centres opened in Kedah when the floods happened in the state in the middle of September with some 5,000 evacuees.

As of yesterday, only one PPS remains open in the Kubang Pasu district with 154 evacuees as the flood situation in Kedah has improved.

A state APM spokesman said the remaining evacuees are from affected areas such as Kg Nangmah, Kg Belakang Sekolah

Dato Kembara, Kg Kubang Kayu, Kg Paya Nongmi and Kg Belukar.

He said Kg Paya Lantau, Kg Bendang Tok Leh and Kg Padang Halban are still affected by the floods.

High water levels of the rivers at Kg Padang Pasir, Sungai Kedah, Sungai Anak Bukit and Sungai Anak Kerbau were recorded as of yesterday.

The spokesman also advised residents, especially those living in low-lying areas, to be more alert and to follow the updates by local authorities.